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Maximum Tuition and Fees To Be Paid Under New GI Bill Program Go Way Up

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The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has released its final list of state-by-state tuition and fees caps that help determine the amount of benefits veterans can receive under the new GI Bill, and the maximum fees that the new aid could cover skyrocketed in several states from the [numbers](#) that were first posted in February.

The final figures exacerbate concerns that had already been raised about how much the program will cost the federal government, but they also bode well for veterans and the private colleges they may wish to attend.

Veterans Affairs officials estimated a price tag for the new GI Bill of \$78-billion over 10 years when they released final regulations for the law last week. But that amount could grow because of the new caps just released.

The new GI Bill was designed to allow veterans to be able to attend any in-state public college at no cost. The state-by-state caps represent the maximum amount a veteran's in-state education could cost, but the caps are also used to determine how much the federal government will help pay for a veteran to attend an out-of-state or private college.

Higher Than Expected

Many college officials and other people following the GI Bill were surprised when the original list of caps was released earlier this year, saying the figures reported then were already higher than many of them expected they would be.

The higher the caps, the cheaper it also becomes for colleges to agree to participate in the [Yellow Ribbon Program](#) the new GI Bill creates. That program is designed to help veterans cover extra costs associated with attending a private or out-of-state college or enrolling in a graduate program. The federal government agrees to match any amounts above a state's caps that a college participating in the new program agrees to waive for veterans it enrolls.

Part of the reason that many states' caps on fees are set so high is that officials in many places have calculated the maximum by tabulating the highest combination of fees a veteran could theoretically have to pay during the course of his or her education. Those included course-

specific fees (which, in some specialized fields, can be quite high) and fees for first-time enrollment or graduation, among others.

For example, the fees cap in California accounted for the possibility that a student might have to pay higher-than-usual fees for an integrative biology course that featured deep-sea diving lessons and for an earth-science course that included a field trip. Many states' tuitions were also affected by the higher-than-average costs of specific majors. The tuition cap in Texas, for example, took into account the cost a student would have to pay for an aerospace-engineering program that included flight lessons.

Big Jumps in Some States

Now, with the final list of fees caps being higher in many states than first reported, student veterans could find it cheaper to attend some relatively expensive institutions than they may have first expected. How much those new figures would help a veteran depends on the particular college he or she wants to attend and the exact tuition and fees caps in that state.

Each state was responsible for reporting to the veterans department both its highest tuition per academic credit and the highest combination of mandatory fees that an in-state undergraduate student could pay at a public college. The numbers released in February were initial estimates, but final caps couldn't be announced until the bill's final regulations were published because several questions had remained about what could be counted as a mandatory fee. The numbers released this week represent caps for the 2008-9 academic year, and next year's caps will be made public by August.

Among the states where the fee cap jumped significantly from February to now is Colorado. The state originally reported that the most-expensive combination of fees at its public four-year colleges was \$714 per term, but its cap is now listed as \$43,035 per term. Oregon's figures ballooned to \$42,828 from \$1,836, and Wisconsin's increased to \$30,979 from \$4,202.

Over all, the average fees per term reported nationwide almost doubled, to \$6,883 from \$3,645.

The tuition rates some states reported increased as well—New Hampshire, for instance, reported charging as much as \$933 per credit, up from the \$424 per credit it estimated in February—but the increases were much less drastic across states than the jumps in reported fees. The average tuition cap per credit increased by only \$32, to \$375.